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Information and communications technology strategy

Strengthening the Department of Public Information, within the existing capacity, in order to support and enhance the United Nations web site in all official languages of the Organization: status of implementation

Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the reports of the Secretary-General on the progress in implementing the information and communications technology (ICT) strategy (A/59/265) and on the status of strengthening the Department of Public Information, within the existing capacity, in order to support and enhance the United Nations web site in all official languages of the Organization (A/59/336). During its consideration of the items, the Committee met with representatives of the Secretary-General, who provided additional information.

Information and communications technology strategy

2. The report of the Secretary-General on the information and communications technology strategy was submitted pursuant to paragraph 46 of General Assembly resolution 58/270 of 23 December 2003. The report summarizes the outcome of work during the past year on the implementation of initiatives related to four main elements, identified as "building blocks" of the ICT strategy, and on the strengthening of the governance aspects of the strategy. It also provides information on the impact of investment in ICT on the operations of the United Nations (A/59/265, paras. 1-3). An updated status of implementation of the major ICT projects, initially described in the report of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session on the ICT strategy (A/57/620), is included in the annex to document A/59/265. The Advisory Committee welcomes the report.

3. Paragraphs 4 to 25 of document A/59/265 discuss the above-mentioned matters under the following subjects:

(a) Infrastructure at Headquarters and at offices away from Headquarters;

(b) ICT security policies and provisions to ensure business continuity and emergency preparedness;

(c) Connectivity to and from all the offices away from Headquarters, including the International Tribunals for Rwanda and for the Former Yugoslavia;

(d) Capacity-building and efficient utilization of skilled human resource base;

(e) Framework for institutional governance of the ICT processes;

(f) Inter-agency ICT activities, including the development of a comprehensive ICT strategy for the United Nations system;

(g) Return on investment of the individual ICT projects.

4. With regard to the project of the Office of Human Resources Management entitled "Galaxy-R2", whose objective as a web tool is, inter alia, to enable human resources practitioners and programme mangers to review applications to vacant posts on the Internet, the Advisory Committee enquired as to the status of the development of screening and filtering mechanisms. The Committee was informed that the ability to conduct structured searches of candidates based on years of experience, gender, geography (nationality) and the capacity to conduct advanced search by key words from the candidates free text area of work experience were made available to human resource case officers in April 2003. This search capability, which provides screening and filtering mechanisms to assist programme managers in selection of candidates, is also being provided to the programme case officers with the release of Galaxy-R2 in the fourth quarter of 2004.

5. On a related matter, the Advisory Committee was informed that the Communications and Information Technology Service and the Personnel Management and Support Service of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations had completed development of the roster management capacity for mission positions through the integration of Galaxy and Nucleus to facilitate the selection by the Personnel Management and Support Service of candidates for start-up missions. Additionally, at present the Office of Human Resources Management and Department of Peacekeeping Operations are developing the capacity to support the identification of prior vacancies with matching characteristics of occupational group, grade level and functional title. By utilizing that functionality, Galaxy will be able to automatically assign candidates to the current vacancies, thereby speeding up the selection process. The prototype of the vacancy matching has been completed by the Office, and it is expected that an initial release will be completed by the end of 2004.

6. The Advisory Committee notes the progress made on inter-agency ICT activities discussed in paragraph 21 of document A/59/269. The Committee had endorsed the view of the Board of Auditors that a comprehensive, United Nations-wide initiative should be undertaken to coordinate efforts on ICT strategy and developments (see A/59/400, paras. 16 and 41). The Committee notes that in coordination with the ICT Task Force of the United Nations System Chief

Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) and the CEB secretariat, the Information Technology Services Division is collaborating with other organizations of the United Nations system in the development of a comprehensive ICT strategy for the United Nations system.

7. The Advisory Committee was informed that the high-level goals of the United Nations system ICT strategy are the following:

(a) Setting out a vision to harness the power of the United Nations system, acting in harmony in ICT matters for the benefit of all stakeholders;

(b) Harmonizing efforts, standardization and investments, and avoiding duplication, leading to significant system-wide savings;

(c) Improving effectiveness and efficiency of services to Member States and governing bodies of the United Nations system organizations;

(d) Contributing into achieving the Millennium Development Goals and bridging the digital divide.

8. The Advisory Committee was informed that the strategy for implementation focused on five areas and identified 15 business cases, each considering and defining the problem, the opportunity, the target position, advantages and constraints, the time frame, the proposed action plan and its sustainability, as follows:

Areas of strategy	*Related business cases*
ICT in development	• ICT integration in development programmes
	• United Nations ICT services sourcing strategy
	• ICT development network
ICT best practices	• ICT governance and best practice
	• Business case preparation and costing
Information security	• Information security, disaster recovery and business continuity
	• United Nations-wide public key infrastructure
Implementation	• Enterprise resource planning systems
	• Common application solutions
	• Open source software
	• Knowledge sharing
	• Web management and content
	• United Nations system directory
	• ICT assets; procurement and disposal
Sustainability	• Training

9. The Advisory Committee recalls that it joined with the Board of Auditors in its recommendation that a more proactive approach needed to be taken in the coordination of ICT efforts in the United Nations and its funds and programmes so as to ensure that the approach taken was cost-effective and met the requirements of organizations and Member States (see A/59/400, para. 42). In this connection, the Committee was informed that some important considerations were: (a) while the Information Technology Services Division had assumed a role of the lead agency in several ICT initiatives launched within the United Nations system, the current strategy did not intend to overlap with each organization's individual ICT strategic framework; (b) the programmatic alignment of the strategy with objectives that were common to all organizations of the United Nations system and not specific to individual organization; and (c) the investments that might be required to implement the strategy should be offset by the benefits achieved through expected cost-reduction.

10. The Advisory Committee was informed that the Secretariat closely follows the development of the Enterprise Resource Planning systems in the United Nations funds and programmes as well as in the United Nations specialized agencies, both in terms of functionality and technology. As an alternative to the Integrated Management Information System was not likely to be imminently available, the System was being kept current with modifications to its technology to replace some of its obsolete technical components and to extend its technological lifespan.

11. The Advisory Committee was informed that although aggregate figures on the positive return of ICT investments could not yet be produced, the methodology and mechanism in place would allow the quantification of the return on investment at the individual project level. The annex to document A/59/265 includes information at the project level on benefits of introducing technology in the operations of the United Nations, identified as support for decision-making process, levering past investments, process streamlining and service improvements.

12. Furthermore, on the matter of quantification of return on investment, the Advisory Committee was also informed that, at the time of preparation of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005, the Programme Planning and Budget Division had made an attempt to identify efficiency gains and savings arising from investment in information technology, organizational improvements and other initiatives. Such savings were identified within 17 sections of the proposed programme budget for a total estimated savings of $33.3 million. This was reported to the Advisory Committee in July 2003. An analysis of the efficiency gains arising from the investment in information technology made at that time showed that gains were primarily in the administrative and conference services area. These gains in some cases enabled programme managers to accommodate a higher level of workload with the same or smaller capacity; in other cases, programme managers were able to redeploy resources released as a result of such efficiencies to other areas.

13. The Advisory Committee was further informed that it was the intention to continue with the identification of returns on investment in ICT initiatives in the context of the proposed programme budget for 2006-2007. As envisaged in the Secretary-General's bulletin ST/SGB/2003/17, the Project Review Committee has been established under the Information and Communications Technology Board, with the purpose of ensuring that ICT standards are uniformly applied to all ICT

initiatives. Departments and offices are expected to prepare and submit to the Project Review Committee a high-level business case for every ICT initiative and to provide justification for undertaking the ICT initiative, to estimate the cost of the project, to identify risks and to summarize its benefits and return on investment. In order to align the budget process with these initiatives, all requests submitted to the Programme Planning and Budget Division for additional resources for new ICT projects in the biennium 2006-2007 involving costs in excess of $200,000 per business case will need to be accompanied by a copy of the pertinent business case, carrying the recommendations of the Project Review Committee. Upon compilation of all projected initiatives, it will then be possible for the Programme Planning and Budget Division to estimate an overall return on investment embodied into the proposed programme budget for 2006-2007.

14. The Advisory Committee notes that interdepartmental joint operations are leveraging the investment made in infrastructure. Joint operations of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Information Technology Services Division are expected to result in a reduction in overall support costs (see A/59/265, para. 11). The Committee was informed that to take advantage of time difference between Headquarters and the United Nations Logistics Base at Brindisi, Italy, a "follow-the-sun" approach was being implemented on network operations. This included two aspects: (a) it allowed the utilization of the available network bandwidth at one site during night-time by a duty station located at a different time zone; and (b) it allowed network support staff resources working during the day at Brindisi and/or New York to monitor server and network operations and to resolve problems in the other computer centre, ensuring 24-hour availability.

15. The approach mentioned above is most prominently used for "help desk services" and Internet access. The help desks for Department of Peacekeeping Operations users and field missions are being serviced by staff operating at both Brindisi and Headquarters. Trained personnel can thus provide for help desk service during an additional six-hour window without resorting to overtime or night differential. The provision of Internet services to offices away from Headquarters serviced by satellite links (the United Nations Office at Nairobi, the Economic Commission for Africa and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia), is optimized to take advantage of the lightly used Internet capacity available at Headquarters outside the New York working hours. Advanced plans for setting up a mirror site of the United Nations web site (www.un.org) in the United Nations Logistics Base at Brindisi will provide users with better service and minimized redundancies in case of down time or failure of either of the two sites. This service will, in the future, be part of a larger disaster recovery plan of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations that will be finalized in the second quarter of 2005.

16. The Advisory Committee sought clarification on the upgrading of the local area network and requested information on reasons why new multimedia applications and other enhancements could not be targeted in a cost-effective manner to selected users. The Committee was informed that the upgrade of the local area network was required to provide increased strength and stability to network operations. As a result of the upgrade, down time had been reduced significantly, leading to the achievement of the availability goal of 99.5 per cent. The network will be capable to support multimedia applications wherever they are required. Specific requests for desktop videoconferencing capabilities have already been received from the Department of General Assembly and Conference Management,

the Department of Public Information and the Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts/Programme Planning and Budget Division to support a more efficient production of documents and audio-visual content. In this connection, the Committee was informed that the targeting of this upgrade to specific desktops would not have resulted in cost reductions. Implementing multiple transmission protocols over the same network requires dual switching and routing equipment and makes maintenance and management more costly and complex. However, their implementation speeds up and simplifies business processes throughout the Secretariat, allowing for the accommodation of a higher workload with the same or less level of resources.

17. **The Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly take note of the progress report of the Secretary-General on implementing the information and communications technology strategy.**

18. The Advisory Committee enquired about the steps taken to reduce the number of existing e-mail systems in various entities of the Secretariat by adopting one single common system for the United Nations. The Committee was informed that the International Computing Centre at Geneva, at a recent meeting of its Management Committee, had been tasked with developing a proposal, including projected costs, for hosting and managing a global e-mail system. The Centre is currently working on this issue.

United Nations web site

19. The report of the Secretary-General on the status of strengthening the Department of Public Information, within the existing capacity, in order to support and enhance the United Nations web site in all official languages of the Organization (A/59/336) was submitted pursuant to paragraph 42 of General Assembly resolution 58/270, in which the Assembly recalled its decision 57/579 of 20 December 2002 and requested the Secretary-General to continue to strengthen the United Nations web site through the further redeployment of resources to the required language posts and to report on the status of its implementation to the Assembly at its fifty-ninth session. In its decision 57/579, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to proceed with the implementation of his proposal on strengthening the web site through the redeployment of resources within the Department of Public Information, to keep the question of equality among the six official languages on the web site under review and to submit proposals aimed at achieving full equality among the languages.

20. Existing resources to make the web site operational and to ensure its continued enhancement and maintenance are discussed in paragraphs 4 and 5 of document A/59/336. Currently, the staff of the Website Section comprises 25 posts (1 P-5, 3 P-4, 6 P-3, 3 P-2 and 12 General Service posts) redeployed from other functions and activities of the Department of Public Information. In addition, three General Service (Other level) staff work in the Section under general temporary assistance. The Advisory Committee was provided, upon request, with a list of current staffing broken down by web site language assignment (see the annex to the present report).

21. The Advisory Committee notes from paragraph 8 of document A/59/336 that the Department of Public Information has taken steps to enhance the web site and facilitate the availability of materials in all official languages by entering into

arrangements with universities in various linguistic regional areas for pro bono translation of information materials. **The Committee welcomes these arrangements and encourages the Department of Public Information to continue this work.**

22. Current workload and future requirements of the Website Section are discussed in paragraph 6 to 11 of the report of the Secretary-General. The Advisory Committee will revert to this matter and examine the proposals of the Department of Public Information in the context of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2006-2007.

23. **The Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly take note of the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations web site.**

Annex

Current staffing of the Website Section, News and Media Division, Department of Public Information

Function	*Title*	*Level*	*Number*
Office of the Chief	Chief of Section	P-5	1
	Secretary	GS	1
Website Language Unit	Office of the Chief	P-4	2
Arabic	Language Coordinator	P-3	1
	Language Assistant	GS	1
	Language Assistant	GS*	1
Chinese	Language Coordinator	P-3	1
	Language Assistant	GS	1
	Language Assistant	GS*	1
English	Language Coordinator	P-3	-
	Language Assistant	GS	2
French	Language Coordinator	P-3	1
	Language Assistant	GS	2
Russian	Language Coordinator	P-3	1
	Language Assistant	GS	2
Spanish	Language Coordinator	P-3	1
	Language Assistant	GS	1
	Language Assistant	GS*	1
Special Projects Unit	Chief, Special Projects Unit	P-4	1
	Website Coordinator	P-3	1
Web Development and Webcasting Unit	Acting Chief, Web Development	P-2	1
	Website Designer	P-2	1
	Database Developer	P-2	1
	Web Development Assistant	GS	2
		P	**13**
	Total (25 established posts and 3 temporary)	**GS**	**12**
		GS*	**3**

GS* — General Service post funded under general temporary assistance.